Shrinking the Afro-Eurasian World 350–100 BCE

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Alexander and the Emergence of a Hellenistic World

THE CONQUESTS

- The armed campaigns of the Macedonians led by Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) began a drive for empire from the west that connected distant regions and spread a Hellenistic culture throughout the conquered lands.
- Alexander came from the frontier state of Macedonia to the north of Greece and commanded a highly mobile force armed with advanced military technologies that had developed during the incessant warfare among Greek city-states in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.
- Under Alexander's predecessors—especially his father, Philip II—Macedonia had become a large ethnic and territorial state. Philip had unified Macedonia and then gone on to conquer neighboring states.
- Macedonia boasted gold mines that could finance Philip's new military technology and his disciplined army. Philip's troops included heavily armored infantry that maneuvered in closely arrayed units called phalanxes as well as large-scale cavalry formations for shock tactics.
- These infantry and cavalry forces were supported by income not only from Macedonian gold mines but also from the slave trade that passed through Macedonia.
- By the early 330s BCE, Philip had crushed the Greek city-states to the south, including Athens.
- After Philip's assassination, his son Alexander used this new military machine in a series of daring attacks on the Persian Empire. Alexander owed much of his success to a readiness to take risks. In his initial forays into Southwest Asia he outpaced, outflanked, and outthought his adversaries.
- Through these rapid assaults he brought under the rule of his Greek-speaking elites all the lands of the former Persian Empire, extending from Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean to the Indus River valley.
- The result of this expansion was hardly an empire, given that Alexander did not live long enough to establish institutions to hold the distant lands together. But his military campaigns continued a process that the Persians had already set in motion of smashing barriers that had separated peoples on the eastern and western ends of Afro-Eurasia.
- In the blistering August heat of 324 BCE, at a town on the Euphrates River that the Greeks called Opis (not far from

modern Baghdad), Alexander the Great's experienced Macedonian troops declared that they had had enough.

- Some had taken wives from the cities and tribes they vanquished, so the army had become a giant swarm of ethnically mixed families. This was an army like no other. It did more than just defeat neighbors and rivals—it forcefully connected entire worlds, bringing together diverse peoples and lands.
- Conquering in the name of building a new world, however, was not what the soldiers had bargained for. They loved their leader, but many thought he had gone too far. They had lost companions and grown weary of war. Some had mutinied at a tributary of the Indus, halting Alexander's advance into South Asia. Now they threatened to desert him altogether. Summoning up their courage, they voiced these resentments to their supreme commander.
- Alexander's response was immediate and inspired. In order to persuade his troops not to desert him, he evoked the astounding military triumphs and historic achievement they had accomplished: establishing his rule from Macedonia to the Indus Valley.
- This far-reaching political vision came to a sudden end with Alexander's death a year later, when he was thirty-two years old.
- The conqueror saw himself as a new universal figure, a bridge connecting distant cultures. Alexander's conquests increased exposure of formerly Persian lands to the commodities of the Mediterranean and to cultural ideas associated with the Greek city-states.
- Alexander founded dozens of new cities named after himself, the most famous of which was Alexandria in Egypt, but also Iskandariya and Khandahar in modern-day Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Alexander seized the accumulated wealth that the Persian kings stored in their immense palaces, especially at Persepolis, and dispersed it into the money economies of the Mediterranean city-states. This massive redistribution of wealth fueled a widespread economic expansion in the Mediterranean and beyond.

ALEXANDER'S SUCCESSORS AND THE TERRITORIAL KINGDOMS

- Alexander died in Babylon at age thirty-two, struck down by overconsumption of alcohol and other excesses that matched his larger-than-life personality and reflected the war culture of Macedonian warriors.
- His death in 323 BCE brought on the collapse of the regime he had personally held together. The conquered lands fragmented

into large territories over which his generals squabbled for control.

- Alexander's successors—his generals Seleucus, Antigonus, Ptolemy, Lysimachus, and others—thought of themselves not as citizens of a Greek city state, but rather as absolute rulers over large blocks of territory, modeling themselves on the regional rulers they had defeated.
- One effect of powerful families controlling whole kingdoms was that some women could now hold great power, an unthinkable prospect in the democracies of the city-states. Queens in Macedonia, Syria, and Egypt—whether independent or as co-regents with their husbands—established new public roles for women. For example, Berenice of Egypt (c. 320–280 BCE) was the first in a series of powerful women who helped rule the kingdom of the Nile, a line that ended with the famous Cleopatra VII in the 30s BCE.
- Three large territorial states stood out in the new Hellenistic world: the Seleucid Empire (established by Seleucus), stretching from Syria to present-day Afghanistan; Macedonia, ruled by the Antigonids (established by Antigonus); and Egypt, ruled by the Ptolemies (established by Ptolemy). In areas between these larger states, middle-sized kingdoms emerged.
- The old city-states of the Mediterranean, such as Athens and Corinth, still thrived, but now they functioned in a world dominated by these much larger power blocs. On mainland Greece, larger confederations of previously independent city-states formed.
- Competition in war remained an unceasing fact of life, but the wars among the kingdoms of Alexander's successors were broader in scope and more complex in organization than ever before.

  Since the successor kingdoms were nearly equal in strength and employed the same advanced military technology, however, the near-constant state of wars between the new kings never achieved much. After battles that killed tens of thousands, and severely injured and wounded hundreds of thousands more, the three major kingdoms— and even the minor ones—remained largely unchanged.
- The great powers therefore settled into a centuries-long game of watching one another and balancing threats with alliances. What emerged was a fierce competition that dominated international relations, in which diplomacy and treaty making sometimes replaced actual fighting. This equilibrium was reminiscent of the first age of international relations in the second millennium BCE.

- Long periods of peace began to grace the intervals between the new kingdoms' violent and destructive wars.

HELLENISTIC CULTURE

Characteristics

- The unification of large blocks of territory under Alexander's successors helped spread a common Hellenistic culture.
- Following existing commercial networks, Hellenism was a shared Greek culture that extended across the entire Mediterranean basin and into Southwest Asia.
- Hellenistic culture included philosophical and political thinking, secular disciplines ranging from history to biology, popular entertainment in theaters, exercising and socializing in gymnasia, competitive public games, and art in many forms.
- Despite pockets of resistance, Hellenism was remarkably successful.

Common Language

- The core element of Hellenism was a common language known as *koine*, or "common," Greek. It replaced the city-states' numerous dialects with an everyday form that people anywhere could understand. ***Koine* Greek** quickly became the international language of its day.
- Peoples in Egypt, Judea, Syria, and Sicily, who all had distinct languages and cultures, could now communicate more easily with one another, and enjoy the same dramatic comedies and new forms of art and sculpture.

Cosmopolitan Cities

- Individuals were no longer citizens of a particular city (*polis*); instead they were the first **cosmopolitans**, that is, citizens (*polites*) belonging to the whole world or universe (*kosmos*). Much as Athens had been the model city of the age of the Greek city-state, Alexandria in Egypt became exemplary in the Hellenistic age.
- Whereas fifth-century BCE city-states had zealously maintained their exclusive civic identities (as Athenians, Spartans, or Corinthians, for example), Alexandria was a multiethnic city built by immigrants, who rapidly totaled half a million as they streamed in from all over the Mediterranean and Southwest Asia seeking new opportunities.
- Members of Alexandria's dynamic population, representing dozens of Greek and non-Greek peoples, communicated in the common language that supplanted their original dialects.
- Soon a new urban culture emerged to meet the needs of so diverse a population.

- Hellenistic entertainment in this more connected world had to appeal to broad audiences and a wide variety of people. Plays were now staged in any city touched by Greek influence and had to translate to any environment.
- Consequently, the distinctive regional humor and local characters of fifth-century Greek city-state drama gave way to dramas populated by the stock characters of standard sit-coms with which any audience could identify: the greedy miser, the old crone, the jilted lover, the golden-hearted whore, the boastful soldier, the befuddled father, the cheated husband, the rebellious son.
- At performances throughout the Mediterranean basin, laughter would be just as loud in Syracuse on the island of Sicily as in Scythopolis in the Jordan Valley of Judea.

New Kings

- A new political style of distant, almost godlike kings developed, in part due to the size of the territories over which they ruled. Instead of being accessible, which was not possible when Hellenistic kingdoms and states were so enormous, Hellenistic leaders became larger-than-life figures.
- Individuals related to political leaders primarily through the personality of the kings and their families. Rulership was personality, and personality could unite large numbers of subjects.
- For example, Demetrius Poliorcetes, the ruler of Macedonia, stood out in his high-platform shoes and heavy makeup, and he decorated his elaborate, flowing cape with images of the sun, the stars, and the planets.
- In the presence of a powerful sun-king like Demetrius, ordinary individuals felt small and inconsequential.

Philosophy

- Hellenistic religion and philosophy increasingly focused on the individual and his or her place in the larger world.
- This growing concern with the individual found expression in many new philosophical schools that proposed a range of ideas, including self-sufficiency (Cynicism), detachment (Epicureanism), and involvement (Stoicism).
- For instance, the Athenian Diogenes (c. 412–323 BCE), an early proponent of the Cynic school of philosophy, sought freedom from society’s laws and customs, rejecting cultural norms as human-made inventions not in tune with nature and therefore false.
- Similarly turning thoughts to the self, Epicurus (c. 341–279 BCE), the founder of a school in Athens that he called The

Garden, envisioned an ideal community of adherents regardless of their gender and social status, centered on his school.
- Seeking out pleasure and avoiding pain, these Epicureans contemplated the answer to the question "What is the good life?" and struggled to develop a sense of "not caring" (*ataraxia*) about their worries.
- More widespread than Diogenes's Cynicism and Epicurus's philosophy was Zeno's Stoicism. Zeno (c. 334–262 BCE), from the island of Cyprus, initiated it, and other cosmopolitan figures across the Hellenistic world—from Babylon in Mesopotamia to Sinope on the Black Sea—developed its beliefs.
- Named after the *Stoa Poikile*, the roofed colonnade in the Athenian agora in which Zeno first presented his ideas, Stoicism argued that everything was grounded in nature.
- Stoicism regarded cities and kingdoms as human-made things, important but transient. Being in tune with nature and living a good life required understanding the rules of the natural order and being in control of one's passions, and thus indifference to pleasure and pain.
- Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Cynicism offered the individual a range of philosophical responses to the Hellenistic world developing all around.

Religion

- Long-established religions were also shaped by Hellenism, and then reexported throughout the Mediterranean.
- For example, Greeks in Egypt drew on the indigenous cult of Osiris and his consort, Isis, to fashion a new narrative about Osiris's death and rebirth that represented personal salvation from death. Isis became a supreme goddess whose "supreme virtues" encompassed the powers of dozens of other Mediterranean gods and goddesses.
- Believers experienced personal revelations and out-of-body experiences (*exstasis,* "ecstasy"). A ritual of dipping in water (*baptizein,* "to baptize") marked the transition of believers, "born again" into lives devoted to a "personal savior" who delivered an understanding of a new life by direct revelation.
- These new beliefs, like the worship of Isis, emphasized the spiritual concerns of humans as individuals, rather than the collective worries of towns or cities.
- Other Hellenistic adaptations from earlier Greek religion, including cults of Demeter and Dionysus, similarly focused on the salvation of the individual as they spread throughout the Hellenistic world.

PLANTATION SLAVERY

- Ironically, philosophical and religious innovations focused on the self were accompanied by the rise of plantation slavery—the ultimate devaluing of an individual—as an engine of the Hellenistic economy.
- Large numbers of slaves were used in agricultural production—especially in Italy, Sicily, and North African regions close to Carthage.
- Alexander's conquests and Rome's political rise had produced unprecedented wealth for a small elite. These men and women used their riches to acquire huge tracts of land and to purchase slaves (either kidnapped individuals or conquered peoples) on a scale and with a degree of managerial organization never seen before.
- The slave plantations, wholly devoted to producing surplus crops for profit, helped to drive a new Mediterranean economy. The estates created vast wealth for their owners—though at a heavy price to others, as reliance on slave labor now left the free peasants who used to work the fields with no option but to move into overcrowded cities, where employment was hard to find.
- To pay for the goods that satisfied their newly acquired tastes, Celtic chieftains in the regions encompassing modern-day France began selling their own people in the expanding slave markets of the Mediterranean.
- Slavery and slave trading also became central to the economies of the Iberian Peninsula—especially in the hinterlands of large river valleys like the Ebro, where local elites founded urban centers imitating Greek styles.

MONEY-BASED ECONOMIES

- The circulation of money reinforced the effects of forced labor. With more cash in the economy, wealthy landowners, urban elites, and merchants could more easily do business.
- The increasing use of Greek-style coins to pay for goods and services (in place of barter) promoted the importation of commodities such as wine from elsewhere in the Mediterranean.
- As coined money became even more available, it led to even more commercial exchanges. The forced transfer of precious metals to the Mediterranean from Southwest Asia by Alexander's conquests was so large that it actually caused the price of gold to fall.
- In the west, Carthage began to mint its own coins—at first mainly in gold, but later in other metals. Rome moved to a money economy at the same time. By the 270s and 260s BCE,

the Romans were issuing coins on a large scale under the pressures of their first war with Carthage (264–241 BCE).
- By the end of the third century, even borderland peoples such as the Gauls had begun to mint coins, imitating the galloping-horse images found on Macedonia's gold coins. So, too, did kingdoms in North Africa, where the coins of Numidian kings bore the same Macedonian royal imagery.
- By around 100 BCE, inhabitants of the entire Mediterranean basin and surrounding lands were using coins to buy and sell all manner of commodities.

HELLENISTIC ADAPTATION AND RESISTANCE

Hellenized Elites

- The new high Greek culture spread far and wide, though it was not fully accepted everywhere in the Mediterranean. It appealed particularly to elites who sought to enhance their position by embracing Hellenistic culture over local values.
- Syrian, Jewish, and Egyptian elites in the eastern Mediterranean adopted this attitude, as well as Roman, Carthaginian, and African elites in the western Mediterranean.
- The Hellenistic influences reached sub-Saharan Africa, where the kingdom of Meroe, already influenced by pharaonic forms, now absorbed characteristics of Greek culture as well.
- It is not surprising that Greek influences were extensive at Meroe, because continuous interaction with the Egyptians also exposed its people to the world of the Mediterranean.
- Both Meroe and its rival, Axum, located in the Ethiopian highlands, used Greek-style stelae (inscribed stone pillars) to boast of their military exploits. Citizens of Meroe worshipped Zeus and Dionysus.
- The rulers of Meroe, understanding the advantages of the Greek language, employed Greek scribes to record their accomplishments on the walls of Greek-Egyptian temples. In this way, Meroe developed a mix of Greek, Egyptian, and African cultural and political elements.

Jewish Resistance

- Not every community succumbed to the allure of Hellenism. The Jews in Judea offer a striking case of resistance and accommodation to its universalizing forces.
- Having been released from their Babylonian exile by the Persian monarch Cyrus in 538 BCE, the Jews returned to Judea—now a Persian province—and began rebuilding Jerusalem.
- While the Persians tolerated local customs and beliefs, the Hellenism brought by the Seleucid successor state that took

Persia's place after Alexander's conquest brought a shock to Judaism.

- While some among the Jewish ruling elite began to adopt Greek ways—to wear Greek clothing, to participate in the gymnasium with its cult of male nudity, to produce images of gods as art—others rejected the push.
- Those who spurned assimilation rebelled against the common elements of Hellenism—its language, music, gymnasia, nudity, public art, and secularism—as being deeply immoral and threatening to their beliefs.
- Ultimately, this resistance to Hellenism led to full-scale armed revolt, headed up by the family of the Maccabees. In 167 BCE, the Seleucids provoked the Maccabees by forbidding the practice of Judaism (by outlawing worship and circumcision) and profaning the Jews' temple (by erecting an altar to Zeus in the sanctuary of the temple and sacrificing pigs on it).
- Though the Maccabees succeeded in establishing an independent Jewish state centered on the temple in Jerusalem, they did not entirely overcome the impact of the new universal culture on Judaism.
- A huge Jewish community in the Hellenistic city of Alexandria in Egypt embraced the new culture. Scholars there produced a version of the Hebrew scriptures in *koine* Greek, and historians (such as Jason of Cyrene) and philosophers (such as Philo of Alexandria) wrote in Greek, imitating Greek models.

Roman Adaptation and Resistance

- Similar resistance and accommodation were taking place elsewhere. In the 330s and 320s BCE, when Alexander was uniting the eastern Mediterranean, the city-state of Rome took the first critical military actions to unify Italy.
- Rather than beginning as a kingdom like Macedonia, Rome went from being a city-state to flourishing as a large territorial state. During this transformation it adopted significant elements of Hellenistic culture: Greek-style temples, elaborately decorated Greek-style pottery and paintings, and an alphabet based on that of the Greeks.
- Many Roman elites saw immersion in Hellenistic ideals as a way to appear to the rest of the world as "civilized," while others resisted Greek ways as being overly luxurious and contrary to Roman ideals of manliness.
- The conservative Roman senator Cato the Elder (234–149 BCE) struggled with the tensions that Hellenism introduced to Roman ways.

- Although he was devoted to the Roman past, the Latin language, and the ideal of small-scale Roman peasant farmers and their families, Cato embraced many Hellenistic influences.
- He wrote a standard manual for the new economy of slave plantation agriculture, invested in shipping and trading, learned Greek rhetoric (both speaking and writing the language), and added the genre of history to Latin literature. Cato blended an extreme devotion to Roman tradition with bold Hellenistic innovations in most aspects of daily life.

Carthage Adopts Hellenism

- Rome's long-time rival, the Phoenician colony of Carthage, also adopted Hellenism but with less internal conflict than at Rome.
- Carthaginian culture took on important elements of Hellenistic culture. For example, some Carthaginians went to Athens to become philosophers. Innovative ideas on political theory and warfare came from the Greek city states.
- The design of their sanctuaries, temples, and other public buildings reveals a mix of Greek-style pediments and columns, Carthaginian designs and measurements, and local North African motifs and structures.
- Carthaginian women adorned themselves with jewelry that reflected styles from Egypt, such as ornate necklaces of gold and earrings of lapis lazuli.
- Already well integrated into the Mediterranean economy, Carthage welcomed the increased communication and exchange that Hellenism facilitated.
- Carthaginian merchants traded with other Phoenician colonies in the western Mediterranean, with the towns of the Etruscans and the Romans in Italy, with the Greek trading city of Massilia (modern Marseilles) in southern France, and with Athens in the eastern Mediterranean.
- In addition, the Carthaginians expanded their commercial interests into the Atlantic, moving north along the coast of Iberia and south along the coast of West Africa, even establishing a trading post at the island of Mogador more than 600 miles down the Atlantic coast of Africa.

Converging Influences in Central and South Asia

CONNECTING THE ANCIENT WORLDS

- During this period, tighter political organization in South Asia helped to spread new influences, like Hellenism and Buddhism, across the region.
- The high mountains of modern-day Afghanistan were a major geographical barrier to east-west exchange, but not impassable.

- Mountain passes—pinched like the narrow neck of an hourglass between the high plateau of Iran to the west and the towering ranges of Tibet to the east—offer the shortest route through the formidable Hindu Kush range.
- By crossing these passes, Alexander's armies expanded the routes between the eastern and western portions of Afro-Eurasia and brought about massive political and cultural changes in central and South Asia.
- Conquerors moved from west to east (like Alexander), from east to west (like the later nomads from central Asia) and from north to south, through the mountains, into the rich plains of the Indus and Ganges river valleys.
- At the same time, South Asian trade and religious influences, especially Buddhism, moved northward toward routes running west to east along what became known as the Silk Roads.

CHANDRAGUPTA AND THE MAURYAN EMPIRE

Chandragupta's Empire

- Alexander's brief occupation of the Indus Valley (327–325 BCE) paved the way for one of the largest empires in South Asian history, the Mauryan Empire.
- Before the arrival of Alexander's forces, South Asia had been a conglomerate of small warring states.
- This political instability came to an abrupt halt when, in 321 BCE, an ambitious young man named Chandragupta Mori (or Maurya), inspired by Alexander, ascended the throne of the Magadha kingdom and launched a series of successful military expeditions in what is now northern India.
- The Magadha kingdom, located on the lower Ganges plain, held great strategic advantages over other states. For one thing, it contained rich iron ores and fertile rice paddies.
- Moreover, on the northeast Deccan plateau ample woods supported herds of elephants, a mainstay of the powerful Magadha mobile military forces, which used elephants to charge down and to terrify the enemy.
- The Mori family, or Mauryans, did not start out as a distinguished ruling family, but economic strength and military skill elevated them over their rivals.
- Chandragupta (r. 321–297 BCE), though of lowly origins, probably from the Vaishya *varna*, grew up in the Punjab region of the Indus Valley observing Alexander's onslaught and aspiring to be an equally powerful military and political leader.
- When Alexander withdrew his forces from northern India, Chandragupta inserted himself into the political vacuum created by the Greek withdrawal.

- Chandragupta's **Mauryan Empire** (321–184 BCE) constituted South Asia's first empire and served as a model for later Indian empire builders.
- After supplanting Magadha's Nanda monarchic dynasty, which had been in place for just over a century, Chandragupta used his military resources to reach westward beyond the Ganges plain into the area where four tributaries join the Indus.
- Here he pushed up to the border with the Seleucid kingdom, the largest successor kingdom of Alexander's empire, based in Mesopotamia.
- Alexander's eastern successor, the Seleucid king Seleucus Nicator (358–281 BCE), responded by invading Mauryan territory—only to face Chandragupta's impregnable defenses.
- Soon thereafter, a treaty between the two powers gave a large portion of Afghanistan to the Mauryan Empire. One of the daughters of Seleucus went to the Mauryan court, accompanied by a group of Greek women.
- Seleucus also sent to Chandragupta's court an ambassador named Megasthenes, who lived in South Asia for years.
- In return for these gifts and diplomacy, the Mauryans sent Seleucus many South Asian valuables, including hundreds of elephants, which the Greeks soon learned to use in battles.
- The Seleucid ambassador Megasthenes gathered his observations while at the Mauryan court into a book entitled *Indica,* after the Greek term for this region.
- Megasthenes's *Indica* depicted a well-ordered and highly stratified society divided into seven groups: philosophers, farmers, soldiers, herdsmen, artisans, magistrates, and councilors.
- People respected the boundaries between groups and honored rituals that reinforced their identities: members of different groups did not intermarry or even eat together.
- Megasthenes also noted the ways in which rulers integrated the region—for example, connecting major cities with extensive tree-lined roads, complete with mile markers. These roads facilitated both trade and the movement of troops.
- Contrary to Greek expectations of a military closely integrated into civil society, Megasthenes reported that soldiers in India were a profession separate from the rest of the population. Mauryan troops did not pursue any other occupation, but stood ready to obey their commander.
- This military force was huge, boasting cavalry divisions of mounted horses, war elephants, and scores of infantry.

The Regime of Aśoka

- The Mauryan Empire reached its height during the reign of its third king, Aśoka (r. 268–231 BCE), Chandragupta's grandson.
- Aśoka's lands comprised almost all of South Asia; only the southern tip of the peninsula remained outside his control. In 261 BCE, Aśoka launched the conquest of Kalinga, a kingdom on the east coast of the South Asian peninsula.
- The Mauryan army triumphed, but at a high price: about 100,000 soldiers died in battle, many more perished in its aftermath, and some 150,000 people endured forcible relocation.
- Aśoka was appalled and shamed by the brutal devastation his army had wrought. He vowed to cease inflicting pain on his peoplenand pledged to follow the peaceful doctrines of Buddhism, issuing a famous edict that renounced brutal ways.
- In this Kalinga edict Aśoka proclaimed his intention to rule according to the Indian concept of *dhamma*, a vernacular form of the Sanskrit word *dharma*, understood widely in Mauryan lands to mean tolerance of others, obedience to the natural order of things, and respect for all of earth's life forms.
- *Dhamma* was to apply to everyone, including the priestly Brahmans, Buddhists, members of other religious sects, and even Greeks. *Dhamma* became an all-encompassing moral code that all religious sects in South Asia accepted.
- With *dhamma* as a unifying symbol, Aśoka required all people, whatever their religious practices and cultural customs, to consider themselves his subjects, to respect him as their father, and to conform to his moral code—starting with the precept that people of different religions or sects should get along with each other.
- He also praised the benefits of agrarian progress and banned large-scale cattle sacrifice as detrimental to agriculture.
- Meanwhile, he warned the "forest people," the hunters and gatherers living beyond the reach of government, to avoid making trouble.
- To disseminate the ideals of *dhamma*, Aśoka regularly issued decrees, which he had chiseled on stone pillars and boulders in every corner of his domain, selecting locations where people were likely to congregate and where they could hear the words as read to them by the few who were literate.
- Occasionally he also issued edicts to explain his Buddhist faith. All were inscribed in local languages, including Sanskrit, as well as Greek and Aramaic in the Hellenistic- and Persian-influenced northwest.
- The Mauryan Empire at its height encompassed 3,000,000 square miles, including all of what is today Pakistan, much of what is Afghanistan, the southeastern part of Iran, and the

whole of the Indian subcontinent except for the lands at the southern tip.

- Its extraordinarily diverse geography consisted of jungles, mountains, deserts, and floodplains, and its equally disparate population of 50 to 60 million inhabitants was made up of pastoralists, farmers, forest dwellers, merchants, artisans, and religious leaders.
- Aśoka's promotion of the Buddhist tenet of *dhamma* and his elaborate administrative structure were not enough to hold together his empire, which did not last long after his death in 231 BCE.
- The proliferation of Buddhism made possible by Aśoka's adoption and wholehearted sponsorship of the faith, however, was a lasting impact of his reign.

GREEK INFLUENCES IN CENTRAL ASIA

- Hellenistic influences shaped politics and culture in the regimes that succeeded direct Greek control in central Asia. Alexander's military had thrust into Asia and reached as far as the Punjab. There he defeated several rulers of Gandhara in 326 BCE.
- In the course of this campaign he planted many garrison towns —especially in eastern Iran, northern Afghanistan, and in the Punjab, where he needed to protect his easternmost territorial acquisition.
- These garrison towns were originally stations for soldiers, but they soon became centers of Hellenistic culture.
- Many of these outposts displayed the characteristic features of a Greek city-state: a colonnaded main street lined by temples to patron gods or goddesses, a theater, a gymnasium for education, an administrative center, and a marketplace.
- Following Alexander's death, Seleucus Nicator built more of these Greek garrison towns before he concluded peace with Chandragupta and withdrew from the region.
- The garrison towns founded by Alexander and Nicator remained and grew into Hellenistic centers. Once the Greek soldiers who had been stationed in them realized they would be spending their lives far from their homeland, they married local women and started families.
- Bringing their Hellenistic customs to the local populations, the soldiers established institutions familiar to them from the Greek city-states. *Koine* Greek was the official language; but because locals used their own languages in daily life, subsequent generations were bilingual.
- For centuries, traditional Greek institutions—especially Greek language and writing—survived many political changes and much cultural assimilation, providing a common basis of

engagement in a long zone stretching from the Mediterranean to South Asia.

- Hellenistic influences were even more pronounced in the regimes that succeeded Seleucid control in central Asia in the late third century BCE. The Seleucid state had taken over the entirety of the former Persian empire, including its central Asian and South Asian territory.
- The Hellenistic kingdom of **Bactria** broke away from the Seleucids around 200 BCE to establish a strong state that included the Gandhara region in modern Pakistan.
- As Mauryan power receded from the northwestern part of India, the Bactrian rulers extended their conquests into this area.
- Because the cities that the Bactrian Greeks founded included many Indian residents, they have been called “Indo-Greek.”
- Those in Gandhara incorporated familiar features of the Greek polis, but inhabitants still revered Indian gods and goddesses.
- Hellenistic Bactria served as a bridge between South Asia and the Greek world of the Mediterranean.
- Among the goods that the Bactrians sent west were elephants, which were vital to the Greek armies there.
- Not only did the Bactrian Greeks revive the cities in India left by Alexander but they also founded new Hellenistic cities in the Gandhara region.
- The Greek king Demetrius, who invaded India around 200 BCE, entrusted the extension of his empire in the northern region of India to his generals, many of whom became independent rulers after his death.
- Sanskrit literature refers to these Greek rulers as the Yavana kings—a word derived from “Ionia,” a region whose name applied to all those who spoke Greek or came from the Mediterranean.
- Aï Khanoum, on the Oxus River (now the Amu) in present-day Afghanistan, was the site of an administrative center, possibly the capital of the Bactrian state.
- Unearthed by archaeologists in the 1960s, Aï Khanoum had avoided the devastations that befell so many other Hellenistic cities in this region. Greek-style architecture and inscriptions indicate that the original residents of Aï Khanoum were soldiers from Greece.
- Following the typical pattern, they married local women and established the basic institutions of a Greek polis.
- Aï Khanoum’s characteristic Greek structures included a palace complex, a gymnasium, a theater, an arsenal, several temples, and elite residences. Featuring marble columns with Corinthian capitals, the palace contained an administrative section, storage rooms, and a library. A main road divided the city into lower and

higher parts, with the main religious buildings located in the lower city.
- Though far from Greece, the elite Greek residents read poetry and philosophy and staged Greek dramas in the theater. Grape cultivation supported a wine festival associated with the god Dionysius.
- The remains of various statues indicate that the residents not only revered the Greek deity Athena and the demigod Heracles but also paid homage to the Persian Zoroastrian religion.
- Perhaps the most adept ruler at mingling Greek and Indian influences was Menander (also known as Milinda), a Yavana city-state king of the mid-second century BCE.
- Using images and legends on coins to promote both traditions among his subjects, Menander claimed legitimacy as an Indian ruler who also cultivated Greek cultural forms.
- The face of his coins bore his regal image surrounded by the words “King, Savior, Menander,” in Greek. The reverse side featured the Greek goddess Athena and the king’s title in the local Pakrit language.
- This mixed Indo-Greek identity was not confined to coins. In his discussions with a Buddhist sage, King Menander debated the nature of the Buddha (was he human or divine?) and showed a keen interest in South Asian religious influences even as he embraced Hellenism.
- These “Indo-Greek” legacies persisted long after the Hellenistic regimes collapsed, because they remained essential to communication and trade around the rim of the Indian Ocean.

The Transformation of Buddhism

- During this time of political and social change, South Asia also experienced upheavals in the religious sphere, as Hellenism and other east-west connections transformed Buddhism.
- Impressed by Hellenistic thought, South Asian peoples blended it with their own ethical and religious traditions. Beginning among the Yavana city-states in the northwest, where Buddhism’s sway was most pronounced, this blended Buddhism rapidly spread to other regions that were experiencing the same changes.
- In addition to Hellenism, other layers of influence came together in South Asia through increased seafaring and interactions with nomadic peoples. This cultural fusion profoundly transformed and enriched Buddhism.

INDIA AS A SPIRITUAL CROSSROADS

- Many land and sea routes now converged in India, rendering the region a melting pot of ideas and institutions.
- Improved mastery of the monsoon trade winds in this period opened the Indian Ocean to commerce and made India the hub for long-distance ocean traders and travelers.
- Another major influence on Buddhism was the Kushans, a horse-riding nomadic group who stabilized east-west connectivity through central Eurasia in the first century CE.
- With Kushan patronage and the thriving commerce their stability brought to the region, Buddhist communities grew so rich that monks began to live in elegant monastic complexes.
- The center of each monastic community was a stupa, with its Buddhist relics and sculptures depicting the Buddha's life and teachings. Such monasteries provided generously for the monks, furnishing them with halls where they gathered and worshipped and rooms where they meditated and slept.
- Buddhist monasteries were also open to the public as places for worship.

THE NEW BUDDHISM: THE MAHAYANA SCHOOL

- This mixing of new ways—nomadic, Hellenistic, and Persian—with traditional Buddhism produced a spiritual and religious synthesis: **Mahayana** ("Great Vehicle") **Buddhism**.
- In the first two centuries of the Common Era, Mahayana Buddhists resolved a centuries-long dispute over whether the Buddha was a god or a wise human. They affirmed: the Buddha was indeed a deity.
- However, Mahayana Buddhism was accommodating; it offered a spiritual pluralism that incorporated outside influences and positioned Indian believers as a cosmopolitan people.
- Mahayana Buddhism appealed especially to foreigners and immigrants who traded or settled in India because it made the Buddha easier to understand. The Buddha's preaching had stressed life's suffering and the renunciation of desire to end suffering and achieve nirvana.
- Newcomers to the region and to Buddhism—such as migrants or traders—saw no attraction in a belief that life consisted of painful cycles of birth, growth, death, and rebirth.
- This sharp dichotomy between a real world of hardship and the Buddha's abstract world of nirvana gave way to the Mahayana Buddhists' vision that **bodhisattvas** — enlightened demigods, ready to reach nirvana—delayed doing so in order to help others attain it.

- These bodhisattvas prepared spiritual halfway points to welcome deceased devotees not yet ready to release their desires and enter nirvana.
- The universe of the afterlife in Mahayana Buddhism presented an array of alternatives to the harsh real existence of worldly living. With its bodhisattvas, Mahayana Buddhism enabled all individuals—the poor and powerless as well as the rich and powerful—to move from a life of suffering into a happy existence.

NEW IMAGES OF BUDDHA IN LITERATURE AND ART

- Just as Buddhism absorbed outside influences and became more appealing, it also inspired literature and art that appealed to diverse peoples.
- A new genre of literature dealing with the Buddha and the bodhisattvas emerged. Buddhist texts written in Sanskrit disseminated the life of the Buddha and his message far and wide, reaching far corners of Asia.
- Aśvaghosa (c. 80–c. 150 CE), a great Buddhist thinker and the first known Sanskrit writer, wrote a biography of the Buddha, which set the Buddha's life story within the commercial urban environment of the Kushan Empire (instead of in the rural Shakya republic in the Himalaya foothills, where he had actually lived).
- Aśvaghosa's largely fictive version of the Buddha's life story spread rapidly throughout India and beyond, introducing Buddha and his teachings to many potential converts.
- The colorful images of Sanskrit Buddhist texts of the first centuries CE gave rise to a large repertoire of Buddhist sculptural art and drama.
- On Buddhist stupas and shrines, artisans carved scenes of the Buddha's life, figures of bodhisattvas, and statues of patrons and donors.
- Buddhist sculptures from the northern Kushan territory, fashioned from gray schist rock, are called **Gandharan art**.
- Those from the central region of India, created mainly from local red sandstone, are called Mathuran art.
- Gandharan Buddhist art shows strong Greek and Roman influences, whereas the Mathuran style evolved from the carved idols of South Asian folk gods and goddesses.
- Despite their stylistic differences, the schools shared themes and cultural elements. Inspired by Hellenistic art and religious tradition, both took the bold step of sculpting the Buddha and bodhisattvas in realistic human, rather than symbolic, form (such as a bodhi tree, which symbolizes Buddha's enlightenment).

- Though the Buddha wore no decorations because he had cut off all links to the world, bodhisattvas were dressed as princes because they were still in this world, generously helping others. What was important was bringing the symbolic world of Buddhism closer to the people.
- Buddhist art reflected a spiritual system that appealed to people of diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Consider the clothes of the patron figures. For male and female figures alike, the garments were simple and well adapted to tropical climates. Those indigenous to the semitropical land had nude upper bodies and a wrapping like the modern *dhoti*, or loincloth, on their lower bodies. Jewelry adorned their headdresses and bodies.
- By contrast, the nomadic patron figures wore traditional cone-shaped leather hats, kneelength robes, trousers, and boots.
- Figures with Greek clothing demonstrate continuing Hellenistic influence, and those wearing Roman togas reveal imperial Rome's influence.
- The jumble of clothing styles illustrates that Buddhist devotees could share a faith while retaining their ethnic or regional differences.

The Formation of the Silk Roads

THE SILK ROADS

- In the first century BCE, trade routes stretching from China to central Asia and westward had merged into one big intertwined series of routes, famously referred to as the **Silk Roads** even though caravans transported many other precious commodities, such as incense, gemstones, and metals.
- Traders traveled segments of the route, passing their goods on to others who took them farther along the road and, in turn, passed them on again.
- The Silk Roads owed much to earlier overland routes through which merchants had exchanged frankincense and myrrh from the Arabian Peninsula for copper, tin, iron, gemstones, and textiles.
- During this period, seaborne trade also created closer connections between Afro-Eurasian worlds.
- The effects of these long-distance exchanges altered the political geography of Afro- Eurasia.
- Egypt and Mesopotamia faded as sources of innovation and knowledge, becoming instead crossroads for peoples on either side of them.

- The former borderlands emerged as new imperial centers. What we now call the Middle East literally became a commercial middle ground between the Mediterranean and India.
- East Asia, principally China, finally connected indirectly with the Mediterranean via central and South Asia.
- Through China, whose traders reached Bali and other islands now in Indonesia, connections developed with Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia.
- China, insulated from the west by the Himalayas and Pamir Mountains, remained politically and culturally a mysterious land to those from the Mediterranean.
- Yet products made from silk revealed to the Greeks and Romans that an advanced society lay far to the east.

KUSHAN - NOMADS AND TRADE ROUTES

- The horse-riding nomads of Inner Eurasia made long-distance trade possible. These scattered nomadic peoples already for centuries had linked entire regions and facilitated trade and interactions between distant communities.
- Responding to the drying out of their homelands in the second millennium BCE, they moved southward.
- Moving from place to place and being in close contact with their animals, the nomads were exposed to—and acquired resistance to—a greater variety of microbes than settled peoples did.
- Their relative immunity to disease made them ideal agents for linking distant settled communities.
- Nomads also raced into political vacuums and installed new regimes that linked northwest China and the Iranian plateau.
- Among the most important of these nomadic peoples were the Xiongnu (Hsiung-nu) pastoralists, originally from the eastern part of the Asian steppe in modern Mongolia.
- By the third century BCE their mastery of bronze technology made them the most powerful nomadic community in the area.
- When Xiongnu power waned, a new empire, that of the Kushans, arose in their place around 50 CE.
- The Yuezhi, a nomadic group to the west of the Qin, unified the region’s tribes, migrated southwestward, and established this Kushan empire in Afghanistan and the Indus River basin.
- The Kushans’ empire embraced a large and diverse territory and was critical in the formation of the Silk Roads.
- The Kushans had been an illiterate people, but they adopted Greek as their official language.
- Kushan coinage, like the Indo-Greek coinage discussed earlier, blended Greek and Indian elements.

- Mediterranean traders arriving in the Kushan markets to purchase silks from China, as well as Indian gemstones and spices, conducted their transactions in Greek.
- The coins they used—struck to Roman weight standards (themselves derived from Greek coinage) and inscribed in Greek—served their needs perfectly.
- Kushan rule stabilized the trading routes through central Asia that stretched from the steppes in the east to the Parthian Empire in the west. This territory became a major segment of the Silk Roads.

CARAVAN CITIES AND THE INCENSE TRADE

Caravan Cities

- As nomads moved southwestward, they produced a new kind of commercial hub: the caravan city. Established at strategic locations (often at the edges of deserts or in oases or at the end points of major trade arteries), these cities became locations where vast trading groups assembled before beginning their arduous journeys.
- Some caravan cities originating as Greek garrison towns became centers of Hellenistic culture, displaying such staples of the polis as public theaters.
- **Caravan cities** were among the most spectacular and resplendent urban centers of this era.

Petra

- One of the most striking of these caravan cities was the Nabatean capital at Petra.
- The Nabateans were an Arabic-speaking people, primarily sheepherders who eked out a living in the Sinai Desert and the northwestern Arabian Peninsula.
- They also facilitated the movement of frankincense, myrrh, and other spices along what was sometimes called the Incense or Spice Road, linking the Arabian peninsula and Indian Ocean with the Mediterranean where Greeks and Romans used these goods to make perfumes and incense.
- Because the Greeks and later the Romans needed large quantities of incense to burn in worshipping their gods, the trade passing through this region was extremely lucrative.
- Although originating in Nabatean herders' practice of carving shelter and cisterns for catching rainwater out of the solid stone of the forbidding landscape, the magnificent "Rock City" of Petra (*petros* in Greek means rock) was made possible by the wealth accumulated from the spice trade.

- Houses, shrines, tombs, and even the vast theater— carved entirely from the sandstone terrain to seat 6,000–10,000 spectators—manifested Hellenistic influences.
- Petra's power and wealth lasted from the mid-second century BCE to the early second century CE.
- The caravan traders, the ruling elite of the rock city, controlled the supply of spices and fragrances from Arabia and India to the ever-expanding Roman Empire.
- Nabataean traders based in Petra traveled throughout the eastern Mediterranean, erecting temples wherever they established trading communities.

Palmyra

- With Petra's decline during the Roman period, Palmyra became the most important caravan city at the western end of the Silk Roads.
- Rich citizens of Rome relied on the Palmyran traders to procure luxury goods for them, importing Chinese silks for women's clothing and incense for religious rituals, as well as gemstones, pearls, and many other precious items.
- Palmyran traders handled nonsilken textiles as well, including cotton from India and cashmere wool from Kashmir or the nearby central Asian highlands.
- Administered by the chiefs of local tribes, Palmyra maintained considerable autonomy even under formal Roman control.
- Although the Palmyrans used a Semitic dialect in daily life, for state affairs and business they used Greek, a reminder of the continued influence of Hellenism.
- Their merchants had learned Greek when the region came under Seleucid rule, and it remained useful when doing business with caravans from afar, long after the political influences of Hellenism had waned.
- Palmyrans built a splendid marble city in the desert. A colonnade, theater, senate house, agora, and major temples formed the metropolitan area. Complexes of hostels, storage houses, offices, and temples served the needs of traders who passed through.
- The Palmyrans worshipped many deities, both local and Greek, and seemed concerned about their own afterlife.
- Like Petra, Palmyra had a cemetery as big as its residential area, with marble sculptures on the tombs depicting city life. Many tombs showed the master or the master and his wife reclining on Greek-style couches, holding drinking goblets.
- Sculptures of camel caravans and horses tell us that the deceased were caravan traders in this world who anticipated continuing their rewarding occupation in the afterlife.

- Caravan cities such as Petra, and later Palmyra, linked the Mediterranean with the silk and incense routes that traversed Afro-Eurasia by land and sea.
- Goods came into the caravan cities via land routes from China, across the Iranian plateau and the Syrian desert, as well as through Afghanistan, the Indus, India's west coast, and across the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea.

CHINA AND THE SILK ECONOMY

- China's flourishing economy owed much to the fact that Chinese silks were the most sought-after commodity in long-distance trade. As thousands of precious silk bales made their way to Indian, central Asian, and Mediterranean markets, silk became the ultimate prestige commodity of the regions' ruling classes.
- Over time, the exchange between eastern and western portions of the Silk Road was increasingly mediated by Persian, Xiongnu, Kushan, and other middlemen at the great oases and trading centers that grew up in central Asia.
- Local communities took profitable advantage of the silk trade from China based on their increased knowledge and contacts.
- Silk was not only China's most valuable export, but it also served as a tool in diplomacy with the nomadic kingdoms on China's western frontiers and in funding the Chinese armies. The country's rulers used silk to pay off neighboring nomads and borderlanders, buying both horses and peaceful borders with the fabric.
- During the Zhou dynasty, it served as a precious medium of exchange and trade.
- People valued silk as a material for clothing; as a filament made by spinning the protein fibers extracted from the cocoons of silkworms, it is smooth yet strong.
- Whereas cloth spun from hemp, flax, and other fibers tends to be rough, silk looks and feels rich.
- Moreover, it is cool against the skin in hot summers and warm in the winter. Silk also has immense tensile strength, being useful for bows, lute strings, and fishing lines. Artisans even wove it into a tight fabric to make light body armor or light bags for transporting liquids (particularly useful for traders crossing arid expanses).
- Before the Chinese invented paper, silk was a popular writing material that was more durable than bamboo or wood. Texts written on silk often joined other funerary objects in the tombs of aristocratic lords and wealthy individuals.
- As the long-distance silk trade grew, commerce within China also expanded.

- Because of reforms in the Warring States period, economic life in China after 300 BCE centered increasingly on independent farmers producing commercial crops for the marketplaces along land routes as well as rivers, canals, and lakes.
- As this market economy grew, merchants organized themselves based on family lineages and occupational guilds. Power now shifted away from agrarian elites and into the hands of urban financiers and traders.
- The traders benefited from the improvement in roads and waterways, which eased the transportation of grain, hides, horses, and silk from the villages to the new towns and cities.
- Bronze coins of various sizes and shapes, as well as cloth and silk used in barter, spurred long-distance trade.
- By the second century BCE, wealthy merchants were ennobled as local magnates and wore clothing that marked their official status.
- As commerce further expanded, regional lords opened local customs offices along land routes and waterways to extract a share of the money and products for themselves.
- Though China still had little intellectual interaction with the rest of Afro-Eurasia, its long-distance commercial exchanges skyrocketed due to the Silk Road trade.
- Southern silk was only the first of many Chinese commodities that reached the world beyond the Taklamakan Desert.
- China also became an export center for lacquer, hemp, and linen.
- From Sichuan came iron, steel, flint, hard stone, silver, and animals, while jade came from the northwest.
- At the same time, China was importing Mediterranean, Indian, and central Asian commodities.
- Despite its early development of commerce, China still had no major ports that could compare to the caravan cities of Petra and Palmyra.
- Most cities in the landlocked north were administrative centers where farmers and traders gathered under the regional states' political and military protection.
- The larger cities had gates that closed between sunset and sunrise; during the night, mounted soldiers patrolled the streets.
- Newer towns along the southeastern seacoast still looked upriver to trade with inland agrarian communities, which also produced silk for export.
- Facilitating oceanic trade became more of a concern for the state during this period, and merchant ships now enjoyed the protection of military boats.

- However, internal, interregional trade predominated, and it fed into the Silk Roads through decentralized networks.

THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM ALONG THE TRADE ROUTES

- In addition to silk traders, monks traveled along Afro-Eurasian trade arteries to spread the word of new religions.
- While Christians would later take advantage of these trade routes to spread their faith, Buddhism was the chief expansionist faith in this period.
- Under Kushan patronage during the first centuries CE, Buddhism reached out from India to China and central Asia, following the Silk Road.
- Monks from the Kushan Empire accompanied traders traveling to China. There they translated Buddhist texts into Chinese and other languages, aided by Chinese converts.
- Buddhist ideas were slow to gain acceptance everywhere they proselytized. It took several centuries, and a new wave of nomadic migrations, for Buddhism to take root in China.
- Buddhism fared less well when it followed the commercial arteries westward. The religion never became established on the Iranian plateau and made no further headway toward the Mediterranean.
- The main barrier was Zoroastrianism, which had been a state religion in the Persian Empire during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE; by the time Buddhism began to spread, Zoroastrianism had long been established in Iran.
- Iranian Hellenism had done little to weaken the power of Zoroastrianism, whose adherents formed city-based religious communities affiliated primarily with traders.
- These Zoroastrian traders continued to adhere to their own faith while traveling along the Silk Roads and did nothing to help Buddhism spread westward.

COMMERCE ON THE RED SEA AND INDIAN OCEAN

- Using new navigational techniques and larger ships, seafarers eventually expanded the transport of Silk Road commodities via the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.
- Although land routes were the tried-and-true avenues for migrants, traders, and wayfarers, they carried only what could be borne on the backs of humans and animals. Travel on them was slow, and they were vulnerable to marauders.
- With time, some risk takers found ways of traversing waterways —eventually on an unprecedented scale and with an ease unimaginable to earlier merchants.
- These risk takers were Arabs, from the commercial middle ground of the Afro-Eurasian trading system.

- Arab traders had long carried such spices as frankincense and myrrh to the Egyptians, who used them in religious and funerary rites, and later to the Greeks and Romans.
- Metals such as bronze, tin, and iron passed along overland routes from Anatolia, as did gold, silver, and chlorite from the Iranian plateau. Gold, ivory, and other goods from the northern part of India passed through Taxila (the capital of Gandhara) and the Hindu Kush Mountains into Persia as early as the sixth century BCE.
- Following the expansion of the Hellenistic world, however, ships increasingly conducted long-distance trade. Mastering the monsoons over time, they sailed down the Red Sea and across the Indian Ocean as they carried goods between the tip of the Arabian Peninsula and the ports of the Indian landmass.
- Arab seafarers led the way into the Indian Ocean, forging links that joined East Africa, the eastern Mediterranean, and the Arabian Peninsula with India, Southeast Asia, and East Asia.
- Such voyages involved longer stays at sea and were far more dangerous than sailing in the Mediterranean.
- Yet by the first century CE, Arab and Indian sailors were transporting Chinese silks, central Asian furs, and fragrances from Himalayan trees across the Indian Ocean.
- The city of Alexandria in Egypt soon emerged as a key transit point between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean.
- Boats carried Mediterranean exports of olives and olive oil, wine, drinking vessels, glassware, linen and wool textiles, and red coral up the Nile, stopping at Koptos and other port cities from which camel caravans took the goods to ports on the Red Sea.
- For centuries, Mediterranean merchants had considered the Arabian Peninsula to be the end of the Spice Road. But after Alexander’s expedition and the establishment of colonies between Egypt and Afghanistan, they began to value the wealth and opportunities that lay along the shores of the Indian Ocean.
- Arab sailors who ventured into the Indian Ocean benefited from new navigational techniques, especially celestial bearings (using the position of the stars to determine the position of the ship and the direction to sail). They used large ships called *dhows,* whose sails were rigged to easily capture the wind; these forerunners of modern cargo vessels were capable of long hauls in rough waters.
- Beginning about 120 BCE, mariners came to understand the seasonal rain-filled monsoon winds, which blow from the southwest between October and April and then from the northeast between April and October— knowledge that

propelled the maritime trade connecting the Mediterranean with the Indian Ocean.
- Mariners accumulated the new sailing knowledge in books—each called a ***periplus*** ("sailing around")—in which sea captains recorded the landing spots and ports between their destinations, as well as their precious cargoes.
- The revolution in navigational techniques and knowledge dramatically reduced the cost of long-distance shipping and multiplied the ports of call around large bodies of water. Some historians have argued that there were now two Silk Roads: one by land and one by sea.

Conclusion

- Alexander's territorial gains were awesome in their scale, but his empire was as transitory as it was huge. Though it crumbled upon his death, Alexander's conquest had effects more profound than those of any military or political regime before.
- Alexander's armies ushered in an age of thinking and practices that transformed Greek achievements into a common culture—Hellenism—whose influences, both direct and indirect, touched far-flung societies for centuries thereafter.
- Hellenism offered a common language, both literally and figuratively, which linked culture, institutions, and trade. However, many Greek-speaking peoples and their descendants in parts of Southwest and central Asia integrated local cultural practices with their own ways, creating diverse and rich cultures. Thus, the influences of culture flowed both ways.
- The economic story is equally complex. Following pathways forged by previous empires and kingdoms, Alexander's successors strengthened and expanded existing trade routes and centers of commercial activity, which ultimately led to the creation of the Silk Road.
- Although the effects of this Hellenistic age lasted longer than most cultural systems and had a wider appeal than previous philosophical and spiritual ideas, they did not overwrite everything that came before. Some, like the Jewish people of Judea and elsewhere, like Alexandria, either fought against Hellenism with all their might or accommodated to it. Others, like the Romans and Carthaginians, took from the new common culture what they liked and discarded the rest.
- In South Asia, the immediate successor to Alexander's military was the Mauryan Empire, which established its dominion over much of South Asia and even some of central Asia for close to a century and a half.
- Once Mauryan control receded, South Asia was opened up even more than before to currents moving swiftly across Afro-

Eurasia, including the institutions and cultures of steppe nomads, seafarers, and Hellenists.

- The most telling South Asian responses occurred in the realm of spiritual and ethical norms, where Buddhist doctrines began to evolve toward a full-fledged world religious system. Greater political integration helped fashion highways for commerce and enabled the spread of Buddhism.
- Nomads, like the Kushans, left their steppe lands and exchanged wares across great distances. As they found greater opportunities for business, their trade routes shifted farther south.
- Eventually merchants, rather than the trading nomads, seized the opportunities provided by new technologies, especially in sailing and navigation, and by thriving caravan cities.
- These commercial transformations connected distant parts of Afro-Eurasia. The Silk Roads and new sea-lanes connected ports and caravan cities from North Africa to South China, created new social classes, produced new urban settings, supported powerful new polities, and transported Hellenism and Buddhism well beyond their points of origin.